

has set aside nearly \$1 billion to compensate the estimated 5500 people who were infected with hepatitis C from tainted blood before Jan. 1, 1986, and after July 1, 1990. Previously, only those infected between 1986 and 1990 — about 10 000 people — were eligible for compensation. This second round of compensation was a key recommendation in the 1997 Justice Horace Krever Commission's report into Canada's blood system. "His reasoning was simple: all should be compensated equally because all of the victims had endured pain and suffering," said Prime Minister Stephen Harper in announcing the compensation.

**Fewer smokers:** Fewer than 5 million Canadians (19%) aged 15 or older reported smoking daily or occasionally in 2005, reported the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey by Statistics Canada. This is down slightly from 2004, when 20% of the adult population smoked. For the second year, the survey found no difference in smoking prevalence among teens aged 15 to 19 (18% smoke daily or occasionally). — Compiled by Barbara Sibbald, *CMAJ*

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.060984

## PULSE

### Canada's physician density remains stagnant

**B**ucking a trend that has seen most countries significantly bolster their physician ranks over the past 15 years, Canada continues to have one of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) lowest ratios of practising doctors per 1000 population (Table 1).

According to the OECD's annual health data statistics, released in late June, the average rate of physicians per 1000 population across member nations (from which data could be obtained) increased to 3.1 in 2004 from 2.3 in 1998.

But while the overall average was rising by roughly 35% Canada's rate remained entirely stagnant at 2.1 per 1000

population over the same time period.

"Canada is the only country not to show some kind of increase since 1980," notes Canadian Institute of Health Information Vice-President Jean-Marie Berthelot.

The 2.1 rate placed Canada in 26th place in the rankings of countries by physician density, well under half that of the top-ranked nation, Greece (see Table 1). Only Korea, Mexico and Turkey have lower ratios (Japan might also rank lower but failed to file 2004 data).

Berthelot surmised the wide variation in physician density rates was a function of the way countries organize their

health care systems. He also argued that the numbers should not be viewed in isolation. "Doctor consults per capita also vary quite significantly from 1 country to the next. For example, in Canada, it's 6.1 doctor consults per capita, while for Japan, it's double, at 13.8, while for the US, it's much smaller at 3.9."

"We should also look at outcomes, particularly life expectancy. Canada ranked second in 2004 and 79.9 years. Japan topped the world at 81.8 years and the US was 22nd at 77.5 years," Berthelot added. — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

DOI:10.1503/cmaj.060915

**Table 1:** Number of practising physicians per 1000 population in OECD countries

Country	1990	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Greece	3.4	4.3	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.9
Italy	—	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.1	4.2
Belgium	3.3	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.0	4.0
Switzerland	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.7 b	3.8
Iceland	2.8	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.6
Czech Republic	2.7	3.4 b	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5
Netherlands	2.5	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6
Austria	2.2	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5
France	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4
Germany	—	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4
Norway	—	2.9	3.0	3.4 b	3.4	3.5
Portugal	2.8	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.4
Sweden	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.3	—
Hungary	2.8	—	—	3.2	3.2	3.3
Spain	—	3.2	3.1	2.9	3.2	3.4
Slovak Republic	—	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Denmark	2.5	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.0	—
Luxembourg	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8
Australia	2.2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.6	—
Ireland	—	2.2	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.8
Poland	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.5	—
Finland	2.0	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.4
United States	—	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.4
New Zealand	1.9	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.2	—
United Kingdom	1.6 b	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.3
<b>Canada</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.1</b>
Korea	0.8	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.6
Mexico	1.0	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.6
Turkey	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.4	—
Japan	1.7	1.9	—	2.0	—	2.0
<b>Average</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.1</b>

Note: OECD = Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development.  
Source: OECD Health Data, June 2006.